

Published Wednesday, April 28, 2010 8:20 PM PDT

Education

District to hold adult ed meeting

Superintendent has led the drive to bring back at least some English-learning classes in Newport-Mesa.

By Tom Ragan

In the wake of \$13.5 million in pending budget cuts and 242 potential teacher layoffs, a town hall meeting aimed at preserving adult education programs will take place from 9 to 11 a.m. Friday at the Costa Mesa Neighborhood Community Center on Park Avenue.

In February, the Newport-Mesa Unified School District Board of Education tentatively decided to do away with the adult education program next school year to achieve nearly \$850,000 in savings. It was a measure taken to shore up millions of dollars in a budget shortfall due to state cutbacks.

But the district administration, led by Supt. Jeffrey Hubbard and the school education, has since decided to bring back some of the English-learning classes in the fall, the result of teachers and students launching a letter-writing campaign and a petition drive, said Gary Miller, a staunch advocate of adult education and a former teacher.

"We want everybody and anybody who's interested in saving adult education to show up," Miller said. "This is going to be an important meeting. We're going to discuss the future of adult education and see what happens. We're still hoping to save the entire program, but everything is up in the air at the moment. Nothing has been set in stone."

The board is scheduled to finalize 242 districtwide layoffs by mid-May after a second administrative hearing for several dozen teachers whose jobs are slated to be cut, said Kimberly Claytor, president of the Newport-Mesa Federation of Teachers.

Of that total, roughly 45 teachers, both part and full time, work in adult education, which teaches English-learning classes to Latino immigrants who live on Costa Mesa's Westside and have come to rely on the program as a way of learning English.

An administrative judge is set to hear the last of the pending cases, Claytor said, and the purpose of the hearing is to decide who qualifies for seniority and whether there are misunderstandings in terms of their starting dates.

In making the layoffs, many of the teachers whose jobs will be terminated are relatively new and are elementary school teachers, Claytor said, adding that the level of seniority figures in to who is going to be laid off.

The district, like many school districts across California, is reeling from budget cuts that have trickled down from state, which has decided to withhold what is called "categorical funding" from the districts.

Part of the categorical funding traditionally has gone to adult education.

Many school districts statewide are axing adult education programs to focus on so called K-12 “core” missions. The decision is an affront to many who work in the circles of adult education.

“It’s good that the district is trying to reinstate some of the classes,” Miller said. “But it would be nice if the district reinstated all of the classes.”

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